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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 002592

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GUIZHOU RIOT: AUTHORITIES FOCUS ON STABILITY,  
CLAMP DOWN ON MEDIA

REF: OSC/FBIS CPP20080630968209

Classified By: Classified by Political Internal Unit Chief  
Dan Kritenbrink. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

#### Summary

11. (U) The following is a joint Embassy Beijing - ConGen  
Chengdu cable.

12. (C) Following the massive riot in Guizhou Province that  
reportedly involved 30,000 people on June 28-29 over  
allegations of a cover-up in the rape and murder of a 15  
year-old girl, Chinese authorities are moving to restore  
social stability and tighten media controls, according to an  
editor at a nationwide newspaper. Party propaganda officials  
issued guidance on June 30 "from the top leadership"  
directing that no commentary on the Guizhou incident be  
published and that media stories emphasize social stability.  
The editor predicted that the official "lessons learned" from  
the incident would be "negative," focused on suppressing  
unrest rather than improving local governance. He commented  
that senior leaders would be looking for "black hands" behind  
the rioting, even though the unrest was clearly a reaction to  
local abuse of power that had occurred over a long period of  
time. Much of the Internet commentary and reporting about  
the incident has been blocked by official censors, but  
reaction to media reports that has made it onto the web has  
strongly favored the rioters and harshly criticized  
provincial media accounts of the incident. End Summary.

#### Authorities Emphasize Stability, Clamp Down on Media

13. (C) Following the massive riot in Guizhou Province that  
reportedly involved 30,000 people on June 28-29 over  
allegations of a cover-up in the rape and murder of a 15  
year-old girl, Chinese authorities are moving to restore  
social stability and tighten media controls, according to  
Wang Wen (strictly protect) an editor at the People's  
Daily-owned Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao). The riot, which  
has received extensive coverage in both overseas and Chinese  
media, occurred in Guizhou Province's Weng'an County  
following official claims that the 15 year-old girl, who was  
found dead in a river on June 22, had "committed suicide"  
(Ref A). Three young men, two of whom allegedly are  
relatives of local leaders, were suspected of raping and  
killing her. The girl's aunt and uncle, who had appealed to  
the local leaders for redress, were reportedly badly beaten,  
with some accounts alleging the uncle had subsequently died.

14. (C) In addition to causing authorities to focus on  
restoring social stability, the riot is likely to result in a  
"step backward" on media freedom, Wang told PolOff on July 1.  
According to Wang, on the evening of June 30, Wang's

newspaper received propaganda guidance endorsed by CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao and Politburo Standing Committee Member Zhou Yongkang directing that there be no media commentary on the incident, that Internet information regarding the incident should be "strictly controlled" and that news articles on the event should emphasize social stability. Wang said he had written an editorial that was subsequently pulled at 19:00 on June 30 following receipt of the guidance. Wang asserted that the "relatively relaxed media environment" following the March Tibet unrest and the May Sichuan earthquake was "now over."

#### Focus on "Negative Lessons"

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15. (C) Wang predicted there would be no positive "lessons learned" from the incident because to the Party's Central leadership, "instability is the worst crime." From the Center's point of view, regardless of how corrupt or unjust local officials are, nothing justifies such unrest, Wang said. Ministry of Public Security had already sent officials to Guizhou to investigate the incident, Wang claimed, speculating that the "facts" about the case of the teenager's death would "slowly come out." He also expected that some local officials would be made "scapegoats" for letting the situation get out of control. Nevertheless, the primary message would not be about improving governance and stopping local abuse of power, but rather a "warning" to the Chinese people not to take to the streets to seek redress. Along with the "negative" lesson learned, Wang expected the leadership to focus on how to prevent such riots in the future, such as by developing an early response system and a

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rapid reaction force.

#### People Pushed "Beyond Breaking Point"

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16. (C) Wang strongly suspected that the cause of the riot was abuse of power at the local level, most likely over a long period of time, which reached a "tipping point" following the death of the teenage girl. The quality of rural governance in Northwest and Southwest China is notoriously poor, Wang asserted, with "extensive ties" between officials and criminal societies. Various unfair practices, abuses and even murders happen on a "daily basis." The Chinese people generally have a "great capacity" to endure such injustices, and it normally takes a great deal to get them to react, Wang argued. That is why most Chinese people have responded to the news with sympathy for the rioters, as it is assumed that they would not have massed in such numbers and with such fervor unless pushed beyond the breaking point, Wang explained. In cases of unrest, however, the leadership is always trying to find the "black hands" or instigators behind the violence, sometimes involving a "criminal group, foreign influence or an official with a score to settle."

#### Most Web Commentary Blocked

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17. (SBU) While there are extensive links on the Web to stories about the Weng'an incident, access to most of them has been blocked over the past day. For example, there were over 4,000 comments on a Xinhua news article about the incident posted on the Suhu.com portal, but all comments were suddenly deleted without warning at about 11:00 a.m. on July 1. Initially there were numerous photos and YouTube videos posted on-line about the incident, but those are now difficult to access within China. In one case, a blogger reportedly evaded censors by putting spaces between the characters for Weng'an County and Guizhou Province. The comment boards on Xinhua.net and the People's Daily-sponsored "Strong Country Forum" were, however, were still allowing postings as of the afternoon of July 1. Many posters on the latter website addressed their comments directly to President

Hu Jintao, perhaps in reaction to his web-chat on Strong Country Forum on June 20, in which he said that he welcomes "suggestions and ideas" over the Internet and that the leadership "pays extremely close attention" to what netizens have to say.

#### Sample Internet Commentary Supports Rioters, Victim

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18. (SBU) Of the comments PolOffs were able to access online, most suggested that netizens are strongly siding with the rioters and the victim. Most were also strongly critical of the initial story put out by the Guizhou Daily, the province's official newspaper, which used extremely sharp rhetoric to condemn the unrest. Sample comments:

-- This incident definitely has a cause. I hope that it will be investigated clearly.

-- I also have a child. I recommend that the Central Government investigate this matter.

-- The people won't be deceived forever.

-- Demand Facts! Why is it so hard to get the facts?

19. (SBU) The Sohu.com site also has a feature that allows netizens to vote in favor or against a particular comment. Some examples:

-- Chairman Hu!!! Premier Wen!!! Our good leaders!!! Please order an investigation. I believe the common people would not make trouble for no reason. Please General Secretary and Premier, investigate this matter! (76 in favor, 13 against.)

-- One can tell from the techniques used in this report that the officials are hiding the truth. (106 in favor, 6 against.)

-- I trust that the Government and the Central authorities will reveal the facts to the entire country. (16 in favor, 52 against.)

-- Who is the illegitimate one? (69 in favor, 0 against.)

-- I trust the masses and I don't trust the Government in the

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least. Maybe I am being extreme, but it is always this way. (115 in favor, 2 against.)

-- Everybody must trust the Party, trust the Government. The party has the wisdom and ability to resolve this type of conflict. ( 10 in favor, 143 against.)

#### Background on Weng'an and Local Media

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110. (SBU) Although located in the Qiannan Buyi/Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Weng'an County is about 95 percent Han and is heavily agricultural, with over 80 percent of its population of 460,000 registered as rural residents. Like many other areas of Guizhou (supposedly China's poorest province on a per capita income basis), it has seen heavy out-migration for cash jobs in China's coastal provinces.

111. (SBU) Reports in Guizhou media indicated that participants in the June 28 disturbance had been ordered to surrender to the police. In addition, Guizhou media highlightd the official attention that the incident had received and indicated that CCP Politburo Staning Committee member Zhou Yongkang and State ouncilor and Minister of Public Security Meng Jianzhu had been involved in directing the official response to the disturbance.

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